

India's road to independence

In 1857, the first big rebellion took place in the north of India, called "First war of Indian Independence", "Sepoy Rebellion" or "Indian Mutiny". This was the first time Indians rebelled in massive numbers against the presence and the rule of the British in South Asia. The rebellion failed and the British colonialists continued their rule.

- 5 In 1885, the "National Indian Congress" was founded. It demanded that the Indians should have their proper legitimate share in the government. From then on, the Congress developed into the main body of opposition against British colonial rule. Besides, a Muslim anti-colonial organisation was founded in 1906, called the "Muslim League". While most parts of the Indian population remained loyal to the British colonial power during the First World War, more and
10 more Muslim people joined the Indian independence movement since they were angry about the division of the Ottoman Empire by the British.

- The non-violent resistance against British colonial rule, mainly initiated and organised by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, finally lead to independence in 1947. At the same time, the huge British colony was split into two nations: The secular Indian Union and the
15 smaller Muslim state of Pakistan. The Muslim League had demanded for an independent Muslim state with a majority of Muslims. India became a member of the British Commonwealth after 1947.

- The Partition of India lead to huge movements and an enormous ethnic conflict across the Indian-Pakistani border. While around 10 million Hindus und Sikhs were expelled from Pakistan,
20 about 7 million Muslims crossed the border to Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of people died in this conflict which least until today. Ever since these incidents, there have been tensions between India and Pakistan which lead to different wars particularly in the Kashmir region.

- In India, the Congress Party ruled for decades the country which had become a republic with its own constitution in 1950. In 1977 the opposition gained the majority of votes. In 1984, after the
25 Congress Party had regained the majority, conflicts with the cultural minority of the Sikhs lead to the assassination of the Indian prime minister Indira Ghandi. Today, apart from the significant economic progress, India is still facing its old problems: Poverty, overpopulation, environmental pollution as well as ethnic and religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Additionally, the Kashmir conflict has not come to an end yet, while both Pakistan and Indian are threatening
30 each other with their arsenals of atomic weapons.

- Concerning the integration of Western values in the Indian population and culture, one can say that the British influence is still omnipresent in the Asian subcontinent. The reason for this can be also found in the persistence of the English language. Many Indians are conversant with the English language, because the British colonialists intended to export their values and culture by
35 teaching the Indian population their language. This was regarded as the basic fundament for further education.

What about the relationship between India and the United Kingdom today? It is a special one, and of course still not without tensions between these two nations that refer to the time of colonialism which from our retro perspective is not at all so far away.

- 40 India has managed to become an independent state with its own political system and is still working to find its own identity. The longer the process of decolonisation lasts, the more we get the impression that only a middle course between the acceptance of British legacies and the creation of a new unique Indian self-confidence will be the right way to go for India.